

Index to
Best American Short Stories
and
O. Henry Prize Stories

RAY LEWIS WHITE



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*A
Reference
Publication
in
Literature*

Ron Gottesman
Editor

*In Honor Of
Joseph Blotner*

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Preface

The American short story remains the generally unrecognized glory of American literature. Just why writers should ever apologize for choosing to compose and publish stories instead of novels, plays, and poems remains to me a matter of mystery. Perhaps, after all, the old hierarchies endure: the ranking of epic poetry over lyric poetry, of tragedy over comedy, and of all possible literary genres over fiction. With poetic epics dead, with lyric poetry admired by precious few, and with drama becoming divorced from literary studies, lowly fiction has gained the top position in the rankings of the genres; and the longer the fiction, it must be thought, the more worthy the writer. Or perhaps the explanation is that with palpable bulk in the literary marketplace comes apparent bargain—hence the low official status of the American short story.

Whatever, American authors—from Washington Irving to Cynthia Ozick, from 1820 to today, from pastoral romanticists to post-modern expressionists, from the genteel to the naturalistic, from mimesis to fantasy—have achieved greatness in writing the short story; and it is the short story form that has continually provided the field for the narrative exploration and experimentation that are needful in extending the boundary of the feasible in fiction writing. In America, story has preceded novel in all ways—in stylistic experimentation, in subject exploration—except in the most important way—in critical acceptance and just evaluation.

In demonstration and in celebration of the achievement of American writers of the short story, I have provided histories and indexes for the two premier anthology series that have so strongly and beneficently encouraged and rewarded twentieth-century American short story writers. *The Best American Short Stories* since 1915 and *Prize Stories: The O. Henry Awards* since 1919 have dependably bestowed the professional recognition and the substantive tribute due to the writers of the nation's most vital form of literature.

This volume provides the first historical account of the origin, the development, and the accomplishment of these two long-running short story anthologies; and it provides separate author indexes to the hundreds of writers whose thousands of stories have appeared in the volumes of the two series. Following the author index appears a title index to the combined volumes of the two series.

I apologize in advance for any errata that may remain among these many data; thanks to the excellent aid of Gary Summers, the remaining errors are many fewer than they otherwise would be. I acknowledge also my continuing debts to two constant friends—Charles B. Harris, Chairperson of the Department of English, and

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William C. Woodson, Director of Graduate Studies in English, Illinois State University. Equally sincere is my gratitude to Helga Whitcomb, Joan Winters, and Destiny Robertson of Milner Library, Illinois State University.

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Index to
Best American Short Stories

Introduction

Some men are like the twang of a bow-string. Hardy was like that—short, lithe, sunburned, vivid. Into the lives of Jarrick, Hill, and myself, old classmates of his, he came and went in the fashion of one of those queer winds that on a sultry day in summer blow unexpectedly up a city street out of nowhere.

With these words there began in 1915 the publication of an annual volume of short stories that would come to exert enormous influence on the development and achievement of American literature. For with these words—the first sentences of “The Water-Hole” by Maxwell Struthers Burt—Edward J. O’Brien opened *The Best Short Stories of 1915 and the Yearbook of the American Short Story*, first of the annual volumes of *Best Short Stories* that O’Brien would continue to edit through 1941. Seldom does the editor of a literary anthology achieve such influence—especially such beneficent and long-term influence—on the course of a nation’s literature. From the first of his annual volumes, O’Brien knew what he admired in short fiction, he knew how seldom he found contemporary short fiction to be admired, and he knew how difficult would be the development of a large audience for the best short fiction that American authors were capable of writing.

And the contents of *The Best Short Fiction of 1915 and the Yearbook of the American Short Story* were not, in retrospect, very promising. O’Brien had selected from the American periodicals of 1915 twenty stories that came somewhat close to meeting his criteria for good short fiction. These twenty stories—by such now-forgotten authors as Will Levington Comfort, W. A. Dwiggins, Frances Gregg, Arthur Johnson, Virgil Jordan, Mary Boyle O’Reilly, and Mary Synon—may indeed have been the best stories published in America in 1915; but, of these authors of 1915, only the name of Wilbur Daniel Steele is occasionally still to be found in discussions of American literature.

The idea for publishing an annual volume of the best American short stories had come to Edward J. O’Brien in 1914, the previous year, when he had been asked by Hiram M. Greene, editor of *Illustrated Sunday Magazine*, to choose twenty-one American short stories for republication in issues of this Sunday newspaper supplement, a periodical distributed with weekend editions of many of the nation’s newspapers. So favorable had been the public response to these twenty-one stories in 1914 that O’Brien—Harvard graduate, dramatist and poet, employee of the *Boston Evening Transcript*—sought and found a book publisher—Small, Maynard & Company of Boston—

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willing to bring out in hard covers a collection of the best stories of 1915 and willing to guarantee for several years the continued publication of such an annual volume, each volume to be edited by O'Brien.

In the introduction to his first volume, O'Brien set as his goal publication of an annual "study of the American short story from year to year as it is represented in the American periodicals which care most to develop its art and its audiences, and to appraise so far as may be the relative achievement of author and magazine in the successful fulfilment of this aim." Instead of the then general lamentation for "the pitiful gray shabbiness of American fiction," O'Brien proposed that Americans "affirm our faith anyhow in our own spiritual substance. Let us believe in our materials and shape them passionately to a creative purpose. Let us be enthusiastic about life around us and the work that is being done, and in much less than twelve years from now a jury of novelists and critics will pronounce a very different verdict on American fiction from their verdict of to-day."

Thus wishing to reform the domestic and foreign opinion of American short fiction in and after 1915, O'Brien set forth to "study" and reward the American authors and publishers of the short story by collecting and introducing annually the best stories and listing the other most worthy stories along with the names and addresses of the periodicals in which they appeared. For a short story to come up to O'Brien's standards and appear on his lists, that story would have to meet firm criteria: it must be tested "by the double standard of substance and form."

"Substance" for O'Brien was "something achieved by the artist in every act of creation, rather than something already present, and accordingly a fact or group of facts in a story only obtain substantial embodiment when the artist's power of compelling imaginative persuasion transforms them into a living truth. I assume that such a living truth is the artist's essential object. The first test of a short story, therefore, in any qualitative analysis is to report upon how vitally compelling the writer makes his selected facts or incidents."

With the test of "substance"—defined also as "imaginative life"—primary to judging successful short fiction, Edward O'Brien put forth his second test, that of "form." To O'Brien, "form" comes from the effort of the creative artist to "shape this living substance into the most beautiful and satisfying form, by skilful selection and arrangement of his material, and by the most direct and appealing presentation of it in portrayal and characterization."

Claiming to have read in the last twelve months over 2,200 short stories published in many American periodicals, O'Brien classified for the "yearbook" section of his 1915 volume the worthy stories that he had read by establishing four groupings. The worst—those stories completely without substance or form—received his attention but not his comment. A second grouping of stories satisfied either the requirement of substance or the requirement of form but not both

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criteria; these stories received in his lists one asterisk. The third grouping of stories—those with satisfactory substance and satisfactory form—received from O'Brien a second reading and two asterisks. And the fourth grouping of stories—ninety-three stories from 1915—received three asterisks and separate listing in a "Roll of Honor." These stories, O'Brien claimed, possessed "the distinction of uniting genuine substance and artistic form in a closely woven pattern with a spiritual sincerity so earnest, and a creative belief so strong, that each of these stories may fairly claim, in my opinion, a position of some permanence in our literature as a criticism of life."

An asterisk awarded to stories listed in the "Roll of Honor" indicated stories worthy of being published in *The Best Short Stories of 1915*.

To his short list of the most worthy stories of 1915, O'Brien added further considerations used in forming his first anthology: he would not republish a British story, he would not republish more than one story by a single author, and he would not republish any story "whose immediate publishing in book form elsewhere seem[ed] likely."

And O'Brien, having surveyed the entire production of American writers in the short story form, found in the stories of 1915 a foundation for his belief that, with proper encouragement and recognition, American writers and periodical publishers could appeal through superior short fiction to the average American reader, the common reader who would "respond heartily and make higher standards possible by his support." For, concluded O'Brien, "we have scarcely begun to build our democracy of letters."

In the twelve years that followed publication of the first *Best Short Stories* in 1915—the period that O'Brien had allowed to American writers to earn and receive the approval of those critics so disappointed with the American short story in 1915—there occurred a revolution in American literary taste and achievement; and the existence of *Best Short Stories*, with its annual recognition of the best twenty or so short stories, deserves considerable credit for the growing achievement of American short fiction. Further, the existence, sometimes brief, of the "little magazines" that sought and published unconventional fiction deserves much credit; indeed, the post-war reformation of national values exerted enormous influence over the directions that American writers followed; and, finally, the mere explosion of demand for publishable material to fill the huge number of periodicals that entertained and informed America in the 1920s played a part in the improvement of the American short story. But *Best Short Stories*, appearing annually, with its contents ordered strictly by alphabet according to the authors' last names, provided a means of awarding distinction to the highest creative efforts of American story writers.

And the appearance of remembered authors in the O'Brien volumes in the twelve years after 1915 demonstrates the innovation and achievement that the editor encouraged: in 1916, Gertrude Atherton and Theodore Dreiser; in 1917, Susan Glaspell and Edna Ferber;

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in 1918, Sinclair Lewis and Mary Heaton Vorse; in 1919, Sherwood Anderson, Djuna Barnes, James Branch Cabell, and Joseph Hergesheimer; in 1920, James Oppenheim; in 1921, Waldo Frank, Ellen Glasgow, and Manuel Komroff; in 1922, Conrad Aiken, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ben Hecht, and Ring Lardner; in 1923, Ernest Hemingway, Ruth Suckow, and Jean Toomer; in 1924, Floyd Dell, Zona Gale, and Glenway Wescott; in 1925, Eleanor Wylie; in 1926, Robert E. Sherwood; in 1927, DuBose Heyward and J. P. Marquand. In greeting and accepting new directions in storytelling since 1915, O'Brien had already—against odds—been successful.

Not only did O'Brien prove charitable and wise in recognizing traditional and innovative authors' attempts at short fiction, but through the introductions to his annual volumes he provided annual "lectures," the reading of which surely influenced the noted improvement in the American short story since 1915. Each year O'Brien explained by repeating, usually verbatim, his criteria for story selection—the test of substance and the test of form, the exclusion of British material and material to come forth soon in hard-cover format, and the inclusion of only one story per author each year; and each year he briefly undertook to educate authors and readers in one particular aspect of worthy short fiction.

In 1916, O'Brien wrote of his attempt to turn the short story away from deadly formulas and toward organic, life-like form: "No substance is of importance in fiction, unless it is organic substance. Inorganic fiction has been our curse in the past, and we are still surrounded by it in almost all of our magazines. The new impulse must find its own substance freshly, and interpret it naturally in new forms, rather than in the stereotyped utterances to which we have been so long accustomed." In 1917, O'Brien responded to complaints from a European critic that America was seized by such a mania and market for short stories that writers could virtually avoid firm judgment of substance and form in their productions.

In 1917, O'Brien complained that "there has been a marked ebb this year in the quality of the American short story," a decline due probably to the understandable absorption of Americans with the world war. Further, the editor did not think that superior fiction about the war itself would emerge until at least a decade after hostilities ended—a prediction that proved prescient. Further, O'Brien believed that special curses upon American short story writers allowed their indulgence in sentimentality and commercialism and the avoidance of any unpleasant facts of life. His subject for the introduction to the 1918 volume became the general adolescence of American society—the immaturity of intellect (and of imaginative literature) as compared with the overall maturity of the nation's commerce and industry.

In his volume of stories for 1920, O'Brien warned against repetitiveness by authors and arrogance by owners and editors of commercially successful magazines; in 1921, he lamented the short-

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ness of American history, the absence of a "racial memory" common to all Americans. In 1922, the editor warned against American adoption of the "dadaist," studiously nonrealistic style of such European writers as James Joyce and Dorothy Richardson. O'Brien's advice in 1923 and 1924 was, it now seems, seriously off-target, when he gratuitously wondered why American short fiction of great merit was invariably sad or tragic. In 1925, his topic was the theory that the short fiction form fits the hustle of American life—a life without time for extended fictionalizing by writer or reader. O'Brien's topic in 1926 concerned whether American story writers were ranging too far from the elements of the folk-tale.

And in 1927, Edward O'Brien finally came out and named the baleful influence against which he had been crusading since 1915—namely, the "O. Henry short story" with its emphasis on the surface of life, with its trick ending, and with its stultifying, mechanical structure. For, by 1927, through leading American writers by example and by stricture, Edward O'Brien had met his own challenge twelve years earlier: American short fiction had indeed come far toward the cultural sophistication and imaginative maturity that had seemed to him so seriously lacking back in 1915.

Edward J. O'Brien had achieved much literary good in the first twelve years of his editorship of *Best Short Stories*, and this beneficence was continued and amplified by this editor through the 1941 volume. In the 1930s, O'Brien discovered and reprinted fiction by such new writers as Louis Bromfield, Morley Callaghan, Dorothy Parker, and Elizabeth Madox Roberts (1928); Willa Cather and William Carlos Williams (1929); William March and Katherine Anne Porter (1930); Kay Boyle, Erskine Caldwell, and William Faulkner (1931); Laurence Stallings (1932); John Peale Bishop, Robert Cantwell, James T. Farrell, and Nancy Hale (1933); Caroline Gordon, Langston Hughes, Allen Tate, and Leane Zugsmith (1934); William Saroyan and Thomas Wolfe (1935); Albert Maltz (1936); Jesse Stuart (1937); Stephen Vincent Bénéet, John Cheever, Frederick Prokosch, Mark Schorer, John Steinbeck, Robert Penn Warren, and Eudora Welty (1938); Richard Wright (1939); Irwin Shaw (1940); and Wallace Stegner (1941).

O'Brien was always fortunate that reputable and important American publishers were willing to commit their resources to the publication of his *Best Short Stories*. Small, Maynard and Company had assumed publication of the volumes from 1915 through 1925; Dodd, Mead and Company brought out the annual volumes from 1926 through 1932; and Houghton Mifflin Company became the annual publisher in 1933—a commitment that this company would generously honor for decades thereafter.

In his introductions to the annual *Best Short Stories*, O'Brien kept addressing current problems faced by the writer and publisher of the best American short stories. In 1928, he encouraged writers to avoid in their writing the socialistic and communistic doctrines brought to the

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United States from Europe. In 1929, he argued against the influence of creative-writing teachers. In 1930, he paid credit again to innovative "small" magazines of limited circulation, particularly those published in the Midwest. In 1931, he lamented the influence of behavioristic psychology on American fiction. In 1932, he declared that the time had come for consolidation of past achievement. In 1933, with a new publisher and in the midst of a great depression, O'Brien reintroduced his 1915 program and criteria for creating and judging the best short fiction—fiction since 1915 clearly exemplified by the achievements of Sherwood Anderson and Ernest Hemingway. In 1934, O'Brien was optimistic about the future of American writing; in 1935 he argued against the strong political pressures being brought wrongly to bear on writers and editors by partisans of the right and of the left.

And, finally, in his introductory remarks for the 1936 volume of *Best Short Stories*, O'Brien surprised his readers by responding openly to the negative criticism that he and his anthologies had drawn from some quarters for many years. Along with the offer of a ten-cent pamphlet analyzing the chosen stories of that year's collection (an offer seemingly at odds with O'Brien's dislike of creative-writing classes and teachers) and along with a published summary of the fine points of each included story, the editor defended himself against several serious charges: that he was acting too obviously as a Communist or as a Fascist; that he was an aging critic in service to past interests and moribund media; that he suffered from pompous humorlessness; that he profited financially from choosing stories from certain periodicals; that he hated stories with traditional plots; and that he would willingly kill off certain small magazines (certainly those that too readily accepted other small magazines' rejected manuscripts). These defensive statements in 1936, coming from an editor who had effaced himself in the annual volumes since 1915, still appear strange to the reader unacquainted with the feuding of political and intellectual partisans in the 1930s. (One particular aspect of O'Brien's life apparently never publicly held against him was his long-time residence in England while serving as a valiant American editor, for he had lived in England since 1919.)

Fortunately, O'Brien could in 1937 return from self-defense to his accustomed role as editor and commentator on short fiction, this time with a plea for the recognition and the encouragement in America of the novella form so long respected in Europe. In 1938, O'Brien published a fanciful introduction to *Best Short Stories* by Manuel Komroff, after which in 1939 he returned forcefully and eloquently to warn America in his introductory comments about the Nazi destruction of esteemed old cultures in Europe, a warning made more desperate in 1940, when English culture was falling and when only American culture remained free and able to defend civilization against the forces of the new barbarism destroying Europe.

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Finally, in 1941, in the last volume of *Best Short Stories* that he would edit, O'Brien commissioned the American writer to recognize the importance of the moment: "It is now the American writer's urgent job at this historic moment in time, where eternity must cross time if any spiritual life is to survive on this planet, to keep his head. While England holds the bridge, he must use such intellectual integrity as he possesses to maintain truth as a point of reference in this mad world. England's integrity in crisis frees the American brain for clear thinking. The American writer may therefore thank God, or whatever he believes in, for the chance which is still left to him to carry on the torch, a chance which would not be left to him if England failed."

The 1941 *Best Short Stories* volume was prefaced with an encomium written by Martha Foley—words of praise for the American editor who had died at fifty-one while defending England from Nazi bombings and who had since 1915 significantly informed and formed the modern short story of his nation; who had read sometimes 8,000 short stories a year in his search for the best few; who had never changed his short-story criteria of "substance" and "form"; and who had unselfishly encouraged other writers to succeed in their creative work far beyond his own personal literary ambitions and creative accomplishments.

No one at the time of Edward O'Brien's death in 1941 could have predicted that his annual short story anthology would continue to appear for many decades, much less that an editor of even more longevity would succeed O'Brien in the annual publication of the influential volumes; but, in 1942, Martha Foley became editor of the volumes, renamed, in time of war, *The Best American Short Stories and the Yearbook of the American Short Story*.

Foley had begun her career as an American correspondent in Europe. In 1931, with her husband, Whit Burnett, she founded the periodical *Story*, first published in Vienna. After moving the prestigious *Story* to New York City in 1933, Foley continued to coedit the monthly issues through 1937 and the bimonthly issues through World War II. As founder and editor of this well-known magazine of short stories, Foley would in almost every one of her volumes of *Best American Short Stories* rightly praise the efforts and achievements of "small" or "literary" magazines in the field of the short story. And, from serving as a teacher of creative writing at Columbia University for several years after World War II, Foley in her editorial forewords to the *Best American Short Stories* volumes that she edited provided less theoretical, less abstract statements about short fiction than had O'Brien in his many annual introductions; instead, the new editor's forewords were informal, personal, and casual in mood and content.

During the war years, Foley told readers of the anthology that the best war fiction would come not during the struggle but instead several years after the fighting had ended, as had happened with fic-